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"Cenni Biografici del maestro di musica Giuseppe Verdi" (Part 3)

Keywords

Giuseppe Verdi; biography

CENNI BIOGRAFICI del maestro di musica Giuseppe Verdi (Part 3)

by Giuseppe Demaldè

translated by Mary Jane Matz and Ernesto Macchidani

This text was transcribed in 1962 and 1963 by Ernesto Macchidani, then with the Monte di Pietà, and now with the Cassa di Risparmio di Parma. Demaldè's handwriting had baffled scholars for more than fifty years; at the most, only a few lines had been deciphered. Then Macchidani, in his free time, began to make a transcript of the biographical sketch. To him we owe thanks for this publication; and to the Monte di Pietà, to the Busseto library, and to the Cassa di Risparmio.—M.J.M.

Quali e quante discussioni portassero nelle famiglie questi due partiti in un luogo che tutto è musica, ciascuno se lo può immaginare.

Diffatti il superiore Governo fu costretto di por mano al l'aratro ma lo faceva con mezze misure per cui l'effervescenza raddoppiò.

Scorgendo il Superiore Governo che le disposizioni da lui date eran troppo futili per calmare quella esca ch'ei dapprima non conosceva, volle essere minutamente informato di tutto, per cui risultando l'iniquo procedimento del Prevosto Ballerini, se lo chiamò a sè e gli impose di troncane le brighe, tórre come parroco le scadescenze provocate a' suoi popolani, di starsene da religioso e non d'intrigante.

Nello scorcio del 1835 la fabbriceria dell'opera Parrocchiale del Duomo di Monza ed un collegio di quella Città a mezzo del Maestro Lavigna veniva offerta la Cappella di Monza e l'istruzione a' quei collegianti coll'annuo soldo di lire Milanese 3000 a cui il Verdi rifiutava forse a consiglio di chi poi impalmò e forse anche per condisendere alle brame de' suoi concittadini che, male avrebbero tollerato ch'esso abbracciato avesse il partito offertogli.

Ma l'uomo caparbio solito ad imporre anzichè farsi imporre col manto dell'ipocresia presentossi al Diocesano Monsignor

Anyone can imagine how many arguments, and what kind of arguments these two actions would carry home to their families, in a place completely dedicated to music.

In fact, the High Government [of the Duchy of Parma] was forced to put its hand to the plow, but did so with halfway measures, so that the disturbances redoubled.

Then the High Government, discovering that its measures were too feeble to calm the uproar, of which it had not been aware before, wanted to be informed in detail about everything; as a result, the wicked acts of the Provost Ballerini became known. It summoned him, and ordered him to stop his conniving, to handle as a parish priest should the disturbances which had broken out among his people, and to behave like a man of God and not like a conspirator.

Toward the close of 1835, the Vestry of the Parish of the Cathedral of Monza and a boarding school of that City offered [Verdi], through Maestro Lavigna, the [post of Maestro di] Cappella and the [job of] teaching their students, at an annual salary of 3000 Milanese lire, which Verdi refused, perhaps on the advice of the person whom he would later marry [Margherita Barezzi], and perhaps also to give in to the wishes of his fellow citizens who would never have tolerated his taking the position.

But the stubborn man [Ballerini], accustomed to giving rather than receiving orders, went, wrapped in the cloak of hypocrisy, to

Sanvitale che se lo abbidolava da oltre sedici anni siccome stretto in amicizia, e gli narrò la cosa sotto aspetto religioso. Ma tacendogli ogni cosa iniquamente operata per cui impetrò ed ottenne la sua protezione.

Così accalapiata l'alta Persona prese a sé la cosa e si pose in corrispondenza col Superiore Governo.

Alle parole del Prelato si dava peso per cui il Governo prendeva misure di rigore verso quelle persone che il Prevosto aveva denunciate.—

Con tutto ciò la fiamma anziché diminuire accresceva di forza divampava a dismisura che per toglierla sarebbe convenuto di prendere ingiuste misure contro 9 decimi della popolazione di Città e campagna.—

Il Prelato s'accorse ma troppo tardi ed in un momento che non poteva più retrocedere ch'era stato ingannato dal seduttore Ballerini, e se ne doleva vivamente ma non poteva retrocedere e s'arrestò quindi in un momento a lui favorevole, senza sua saputa.

Per accettare la popolazione l'Anzianato ed il Monte officiati dai Filarmonici stabilirono di stipendiare un Maestro di Musica da scegliersi per concorso. La proposta fu approvata dal Governo e per pubblici avvisi nella primavera del 1836 fu annunziato il concorso, a cui fu dato al Governo per esaminatore il maestro di Corte Signor Giuseppe Allinovi.

Concorsero soltanto un Rossi di Guastalla ed il nostro Verdi. Ebbe uno scacco il primo precisamente per ignoranza; un trionfo l'altro per la sua dottrina in tutta l'estensione dell'arte Musicale per cui ottenne documento che lo qualificava capace non soltanto per Maestro in Busseto ma per qualunque Capitale.

Reduce dall'esame il Verdi si recava tra noi pieno d'onore.

Al suo arrivo la popolazione lo salutò in fino al delirio ed il Corpo Filarmonico fece festa e lo inghirlandava.—

Nel maggio successivo impalmò la Margherita Barezzi con soddisfazione di tutti per cui anche questa circostanza fu segnalata dalle più vive dimostrazioni.

Egli intraprese tosto il suo incarico di Maestro a cui si affidarono non pochi scolari che istruiva con molto impegno.—

the Bishop, Monsignor [Luigi] Sanvitale, whom he had gulled for more than sixteen years, as if he were a close friend. He described the whole affair as if it were a religious matter. But since he said nothing about all his evil machinations, he got his way and obtained [the Bishop's] protection.

Caught up in this way, the high Personage [Sanvitale] took up the matter himself and began to 'write the High Government [in Parma].

People gave weight to the Prelate's words, and so the Government took rigorous measures against those whom the Provost had accused.

With all this, the fire, instead of dying out, raged on and got out of control, so that anyone wanting to put it out would have had to take unjust measures against nine-tenths of the people of [Busseto] and the country nearby.

The Prelate finally realized—but too late, and at a time when he could not back down—that he had been tricked by the seductive Ballerini; and he was extremely sorry, but could not change his stand; then he stopped short, in a moment favorable to him, though he was not aware of this.

To satisfy the people, the Elders of the Church and the Monte [di Pietà] supported by the members of the Philharmonic agreed to pay a Maestro of Music who would be chosen by competition. The proposal was approved by the Government; and in the spring of 1836, public notices announced the competition, to be judged by the Court Maestro, Signor Giuseppe Allinovi.

Only a certain Rossi from Guastalla and our Verdi competed. The former was neatly checkmated because of his ignorance; the latter triumphed because of his sound knowledge in every branch of musical art, and was awarded a document which pronounced him fit to be Maestro not only in Busseto but in any capital.

Returning from the competition, Verdi came home covered with honors.

On his arrival, the people greeting him went mad, and the Philharmonic members fêted him and garlanded him with wreaths.

The following May, he married Margherita Barezzi, to the general satisfaction of all; so this event too was marked by the liveliest demonstrations.

He soon began his work as Maestro; to him were entrusted many students, whom he taught with great dedication.

Con tutto ciò egli non istava ozioso: impiegava le ore libere nello studio di lettere e di professioni. Ei componeva pei Filarmonici pezzi concertati per ogni sorta di strumento che faceva eseguire in pubbliche adunanze. —

Vestì di note Musicali il famoso coro del Chiarissimo Cav. Alessandro Manzoni nel Conte di Carmagnola a sole quattro voci e Piano forte.

Per giungere a conoscere l'ingegno di questo giovine, veggia ed ascolti quel Divino lavoro. —

Così dicasi del 5 Maggio dello stesso Manzoni, delle lamentazioni di Geremia tradotte dalla lingua morta alla nostra dal valente Evasio Leoni, e diverse Romanze che videro le stampe. —

Mentre andava progredendo nella carriera, gli nasceva una bambina di straordinaria bellezza. Nè le indefesse cure de' genitori nè l'arte medica potevano salvarlo dalla morte. —

Un suo amico gli compose un libretto da Musicarsi intitolato "Rochester" e terminava lo spartito nella primavera del 1838. Qual fine facesse quel lavoro non lo si potrebbe dire. Pare però che al librettista non piacesse abbastanza la poesia e che quindi ostasse per l'esecuzione giacchè nell'autunno del 1839 esordiva nel gran Teatro della Scala coll'opera "OBERTO CONTE DI S. BONIFACIO" che per primo lavoro ebbe le meritate lodi dal colto pubblico Milanese. —

Fu poscia eseguito a Torino indi a Genova finalmente a Napoli ma che non ne sortì l'esito ch'ebbe nell'autunno.

Volle che la riduzione venisse dedicata al suo amico Signor Francesco Pasetti. —

Questa prima produzione teatrale del Verdi fece breccia nell'animo dell'avveduto, accorto ed intelligente Impresario Teatrale Signor Bartolomeo Merelli, il quale firmò il contratto per tre opere da rappresentarsi nei teatri di sua appartenenza in Milano. —

Per soddisfare il Verdi all'assunto impegno, s'imprese a trattare un vecchio libretto di carattere buffo intitolato un giorno di Regno.

Stava musicando quel libretto quando tutto in un tratto venne ad infermargli un di lui figlio dell'età di poco più di un anno che per riaverlo non valsero le premure de' genitori nè le cure dell'arte medica. —

In spite of all this, he did not rest on his laurels: he used his free time to study literature and the arts. For the Philharmonic he composed ensemble pieces for all kinds of instruments and had these performed in public.

He set to music the famous chorus of *Il Conte di Carmagnola* by the Illustrious Cavalier Alessandro Manzoni for four solo voices and piano.

To grasp the genius of this young man you have to see and hear that divine work.

The same can be said of *Il Cinque Maggio* [Manzoni's ode on the death of Napoleon], of the *Lamentazioni di Geremia*, translated from the dead tongue into ours by the skillful Evasio Leoni, and of several *Romanze* which were printed. [Note: a first edition of one of the *Romanze*, dedicated by Verdi to Demaldè, and signed by the composer, is in the Monte di Pietà archives.]

While he was making progress in his career, an extraordinarily beautiful daughter was born to him. But neither the tireless care of her parents nor medical art could save her from death.

One of his friends wrote for him a libretto called *Rochester*, to be set to music, and Verdi finished the score in the spring of 1838. What became of this work one cannot say. It seems, however, that the librettist was not sufficiently satisfied with the poetry and that he therefore prevented the performance, since in the fall of 1839 [Verdi] made his debut with the opera *Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio*, which, as a first opera, won deserved praise from the cultivated Milanese audience.

It was performed afterwards in Turin, then in Genoa, and finally in Naples, but was not received as well as it had been in the fall.

[Verdi] wanted the vocal score to be dedicated to his friend Signor Francesco Pasetti.

This first theatrical work by Verdi made its mark on the clever, alert and intelligent theatrical impresario, Signor Bartolomeo Merelli, who signed a contract for three operas to be played in the Milanese theatres that he controlled.

To satisfy the terms of the agreement, Verdi tried to handle an old buffo libretto called *Un giorno di regno*.

He was setting that to music when suddenly his son, a little over a year old, fell ill; and neither the parents' care nor the attentions of medical art could save him.

Nel Giugno successivo del 1840 s'infermò d'Encefalite l'adorata di lui consorte. Quali e quante premure egli non avesse per risanarla ognuno se la può figurare, ma nè queste, nè l'arte medica bastarono; ed in meno di otto giorni periva pur essa in Milano tra le braccia del padre suo Barezzi Antonio.—

Queste disavventure in poco più di tre anni scoraggiarono ed avvilito il nostro Verdi infino al punto di ebrazione mentale. Abbandonò tostamente Milano quasi per non più ritornarvi; ma il contratto col Signor Merelli lo costringeva a recarvisi per protestarlo., ma nè impegni nè ragioni valsero a persuadere l'impresa, per cui fu costretto di riprendere l'opera incominciata ed ultimarla.

Ognuno può figurarsi che parto poteva sortire da un animo esacerbato, avvilito, angustiato, pur pure quello spartito contiene 4 pezzi di bella fattura ultimati prima delle disavventure sopraggiuntegli.—

Nel Settembre 1840 andò sulle grandi scene della Scala coi Coniugi Marini e Salvi; ma sia che quel lavoro non giungesse alle aspettative del colto pubblico Milanese, sia per l'indisposizione della prima donna ed altre non conosciute circostanze come dissero i giornali il fatto sta che quello spartito ebbe la sorte del nome che portava in fronte.

Videro le stampe alcuni pezzi de quest'opera e piacquero.

Venne dagli amici pregato dopo l'esito infelice di quello spartito di rivederlo, emendarlo ecc. ma l'avversione per gli antecedenti ne lo distolsero. Anzi l'obbligarlo a scrivere quell'opera subito dopo le traversie avute, fu motivo di chiedere lo scioglimento del contratto col Signor Merelli per cui si impegnarono amici i quali stabilirono che il Verdi scrivesse ancora un'opera seria per l'imperiale Reale Teatro della Scala rimanendo con ciò sciolto ogni obbligo coll'impresa.—

Fu scelto il Signor Temistocle Solera a poeta pel libretto, al quale parve adatto pel molto sentire del Verdi, il Nabuccodonosor.

Ed infatti il Verdi s'infermò talmente nel fatto storico, e nella poesia da cui sortì quel capolavoro che nel Marzo del 1842 venne prodotto sulle massime scene della Scala in Milano.—

The following June, in 1840, his adored wife became ill with encephalitis. We can all imagine what cares Verdi took to try to restore her to health, but neither those nor medical art could save her, and in less than eight days she, too, died in Milan, in the arms of her father Antonio Barezzi.

These misfortunes, suffered in little more than three years, discouraged and disheartened our Verdi to the point where he was insane with grief. He left Milan at once, as if never to return, but the contract with Signor Merelli forced him to go back, to try to break it; but the impresario remained deaf both to pleas and to argument, and so Verdi had to take up the opera he had begun and finish it.

Anyone can imagine what came from a soul so torn, so beaten down, so tormented; yet even that score has four well-written pieces, composed before the disasters struck.

In September 1840 it reached the large stage of La Scala with the husband-and-wife team of Marini and Salvi; but, whether because the work did not satisfy the expectations of the cultivated Milanese audience, or whether because of the prima donna's illness and of other unknown circumstances, as the newspapers reported, the fact is that the fate of this score matched its title [i.e., its reign lasted only one day].

Some pieces from this opera were printed; and the public liked them.

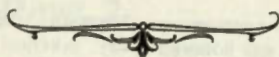
His friends begged him to revise that score after its unfortunate première, to touch it up, etc., but his revulsion over what had led up to it turned him against it. In fact, because [Merelli had] obliged him to write that opera so soon after [the deaths of his son and wife], [Verdi] asked to be released from the contract with Signor Merelli; to make this possible, his friends agreed that he would write one more serious opera for the Imperial Royal Teatro della Scala, and with that out of the way, he would be free of any further obligation to the management.

Signor Temistocle Solera was chosen as poet for the libretto, which seemed right for Verdi because of his strong feeling for it: *Nabuccodonosor*.

And in fact Verdi was so captivated with the historical subject, and with the poetry from which it was taken, that in March of 1842 it was produced on the greatest stage, La Scala in Milan.

In verità i Milanesi non si aspettavano
un sì grandioso e magnifico lavoro.—

Truly, the people of Milan did not expect
such a grandiose and magnificent work.



The text of the sketch ends here, but notes covering all of Verdi's life into the mid-1850s are in the uncatalogued material of the library of Busseto, which houses the Monte di Pietà archive. Selected material from these notes will appear in forthcoming Newsletters, together with brief biographical sketches of the people Demaldè mentions.

To understand the relationships among these people, it is important to realize the extent to which their families were interrelated. Barezzi's wife was a Demaldè; Verdi's aunt married a Demaldè; Verdi's godfather, Don Pietro Casali, was brother-in-law to a Demaldè, and his nephew Don Luigi Demaldè was Carlo Verdi's notary, as is proved by signatures on Verdi's land leases in the Diocesan Archive in Fidenza. One of Casali's descendants married a Verdi (and, incidentally, another of his descendants is the aunt of the composer Ottorino Respighi).

Giuseppe Demaldè, the author of this sketch, was the son of a Carrara, and his daughter Caterina married a Carrara, thus becoming the direct ancestor of the present Verdi heirs, the Carrara-Verdis. All the Demaldè papers not in the Busseto library are at Sant'Agata.—M.J.M.

Additions to the Archive

As a result of a grant from the Martha Baird Rockefeller Music Fund, the Archive has begun to acquire microfilms of Verdi holdings in private collections. Individuals owning documents, letters, librettos of specific productions, MS copies of orchestral scores, early prints of scores, and rare books about Verdi, or films of these items, are requested to get in touch with the Director.

In the earliest phase of this project we have acquired films of more than fifty items, including such rarities as the Ricordi catalogue in numerical order, three volumes comprising plate numbers 1 to 100,063, the entire 19th-century publication list. Also filmed were the partially autograph MSS of *Jerusalem* and *Macbeth II* and printed orchestral scores for *Aroldo*, *La*

battaglia di Legnano, *Ernani*, *I lombardi*, *Luisa Miller*, *Macbeth II*, *Nabucco*, *Simon Boccanegra II*, and *Les Vêpres siciliennes*.

The archive is also pleased to acknowledge receipt of films of the orchestral scores of *Stiffelio* and *La forza del destino I* from donor Marc T. Faw.

The Institute is pleased to announce that W. W. Norton has offered copies of William Weaver's *Seven Verdi Librettos* (1975), which retails at \$20, to members at \$12. J. Boonin has offered Martin Chusid's *A Catalog of Verdi's Operas* (1974), which retails at \$15, to members at \$10.50. Add 50¢ per volume for postage and handling, make checks payable to the American Institute for Verdi Studies, and order from the Institute.